



Handwritten Japanese calligraphy in black ink, arranged in vertical columns.



42



ALL NATURAL

Handwritten Japanese calligraphy in black ink, arranged in vertical columns.



#39



Vertical Japanese text: 遠にかはに大は茶の様に...

prune juice

Issue #39

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Founded by Alexis Rotella in 2009, [Prune Juice Journal](#) is recognized as the longest-running international literary journal dedicated solely to exploring new directions in English Senryu and related forms, including Kyoka, Haibun, Haiga, and Rengay.

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Best of Issue

Each new issue of Prune Juice features a best-of-issue senryu chosen by one of the co-editors.

proxy war chills at Netflix

Tazeen Fatma, India

When we first came up with the idea of introducing a “Best of Issue” award for individual senryu, Antoinette, Peter, and I spoke at length about the qualities we felt constituted a truly great senryu. Ultimately, we settled upon five key criteria: sound, freshness, style, resonance, and, when applicable, humour (of course, not all senryu have to be funny, but we very much enjoy when they are). It’s not necessary for a piece to be strong in all of these areas – and, in fact, some poems are so strong in one respect that the other criteria become an afterthought – but we noticed that the senryu we most admired featured some attention to detail with all of these. It was with this rubric that we assessed the submissions for Issue 39, and it was with this rubric that I picked our first winner.

I should note that the submissions we received for our maiden issue as an editorial team were excellent, which made selecting just one senryu for this award an agonizing task. Special consideration went into many poems, including Jerome Berglund’s topical and well-crafted “masculinity” and Giorgio Bacchi’s hilarious and slightly perverse “new government” – both of which could have easily been selected. However, it was the strength of “proxy war” in all of the aforementioned areas that won out in the end.

At first glance, the poem might appear to be something of a bewildering “word salad.” But after multiple readings, the real skill behind the words starts to shine through. The use of cacophony complements the gravity and immediacy of the “proxy war” subject matter (need I even mention the blue-and-yellow elephant in the room?) The clever inversion of the phrase “Netflix and chill” (usually meant to refer to casual sex), instead produces an effect of uncomfortability or distress. The monoku formatting allows the reader to cluster the words at their own liberty and still arrive at the primary meaning. The central juxtaposition creates ample opportunities for re-readings. (I thought of, for example, macro sociopolitical issues and Ciceronian notions of “bread and circuses” in one reading, and was then drawn to the limited domestic scope and the commentary on streaming culture in the next.) And while this senryu might be more unsettling than it is funny, the truly ironic among us might find something darkly comedic in its larger implications about our current societal struggles and their growing inescapability.

With all this in mind, it was clear to me that Fatma had written something exceptional, and, as a result, I’m thrilled to announce her as the winner of *Prune Juice’s* inaugural “Best of Issue” award!

Aaron Barry, Co-Editor
May, 2023

Senryu & Kyoka

a breakthrough
during the climax—
plan b

the aesthetics
of roadside murals
class divide

Aksheeya, India

old pond
the only kind of orgy
I've ever seen

Vidhi Ashar, India

h(AI)ku

depression pills for craters on the moon

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

amarbel blooming—
dad asks me
for the umpteenth loan

the huge scrotum
of a golden hamster—
new government

Giorgio Bacchi, Italy

lift door opening
the nanosecond
of eye contact

graduation day
a mother's hat
at a jaunty angle

Ingrid Baluchi, North Macedonia

river swallowing the ten-faced night

Rowan Beckett, USA

morning writing
at the coffee shop
the smell of synonyms

cold front
I end up using
an antonym

Brad Bennett, USA

in Ukraine
another volley of missiles
adjusting the contrast

David A. Berger, USA

masculinity
parts per
million

Jerome Berglund, USA

his old olds
the smell of gas
when it was cheap

art opening
what we see
what we miss

Elizabeth Black, USA

clear night
the death jingle
of a video game

car sputtering
the irrelevance
of the moon

Shawn Blair, USA

just a pig
living in the year
of the rabbit

Ed Bremson, USA

waiting for confession
I notice
The Virgin's thigh

Marc Brimble, Spain

endangered species
the carousel rider
almost a teenager

Randy Brooks, USA

bugs! he goes pesticidal

Susan Burch, USA

he reads the reviews
but never the books
blind date

Alanna C. Burke, USA

ginger tea
she prefers
abortion this time too

Ram Chandran, India

sunrise between high-rises ancestral wisdom

spring equinox
half-thinking to water
my plants

Hemapriya Chellappan, India

driving wind
a shopping bag explores
my world

Thomas Chockley, USA

play date hiding in a see-through bin

Bill Cooper, USA

v-formation
the purple side
of my brain

Sue Courtney, New Zealand

blood moon
siblings divide
the hospital bill

forever you and Al

Alvin B. Cruz, Philippines

clear skies
I bring along
my own clouds

Dan Curtis, Canada

neighbour's funeral
my wife cries more
than the widow

Tracy Davidson, UK

fire drill
his false teeth
first

back porch
grandma's story reduced
to pronouns and verbs

Pat Davis, USA

insomnia—
my daughter and I compare
cannabis products

elehna de sousa, Canada

fretting
before and after
Rachmaninoff

Julie Emerson, Canada

taking the long extraterrestrial view

Robert Epstein, USA

this is the life hey mayfly

Keith Evetts, UK

infinite stars
indefinite
i

David Kāwika Eyre, USA

economy class
for 10 hours
pretzelized

Susan Farner, USA

whipped cream—
turning an anathema
into blessing

my struggles with routine word ladder

Tazeen Fatma, India

The Big Dipper brothers compare the effects of Flomax

Bruce H. Feingold, USA

algorithm
selling me dog food
. . . new emptiness

B.A. France, USA

Wordle
I start with
C-H-E-A-T

fairy tales
mother takes the edge
off the wolf

Terri L. French, USA

work trip
the loneliness of
the neighborhood bar

Ben Gaa, USA

bed of straw man fallacy

Michael J. Galko, USA

out of the closet
my transformation
to spring shirts

Patrick Gallagher, USA

string theory
slipping a loop
and hopping aboard

shopping list
lottery ticket
a tin of beans

Mark Gilbert, UK

stretching
the truth
relaxed fit

my drive to work
next exit
Mars

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

before baby's first breath the doctor's callused hands

John S Green, USA

community garden
this year
more sunflowers

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, USA

discarded laundry
the life-changing magic
of giving up

Mihan Han, Canada

airing secrets
deciphering our code
in the wet patch

Patricia Hawkhead, UK

the rooster crows his complicated coffee order

Kerry J Heckman, USA

first dry day
the sidewalk chalked
for hopscotch

Frank Higgins, USA

morning shower
I concuss myself
on the safety bar

Ruth Holzer, USA

outback highway
a thousand miles
of fatality markers

Louise Hopewell, Australia

empty nesters
we give our robot vacuum
a name

Lee Hudspeth, USA

ice storm
neighborisms
brewing

Jonathan Humphrey, USA

annual coup overthrowing the sock drawer

Peter Jastermsky, USA

grief season
i put the shell
back where it was

Amoolya Kamalnath, India

falling in love . . .
the softened edges
of his consonants

Julie Bloss Kelsey, USA

mental health workshop
again I cancel
my day off

Ian Kenney, Canada

hospice invoice:
date of arrival
date of departure

Ellen Kom, Canada

his reply
shorter than my question
creeping haze

Nadejda Kostadinova, Bulgaria

March Madness
even grandma checks
the DraftKings line

Douglas J. Lanzo, USA

unresponsive
the companion animal's
first big test

Michael Henry Lee, USA

high school yearbook
silence
on the dead girl's page

(b)older

Barrie Levine, USA

hunger moon
last lights go off
in the food court

Angela Leuck, Canada

lunch with the family
just the sound
of forks

Antonietta Losito, Italy

another classmate
I can't remember
in the obits
all the news fit to print
straight to the recycle bin

Bob Lucky, Portugal

All Hallows Eve—
one more Wednesday
in the nightclub line

Roman Lyakhovetsky, Israel

game night
our daughter
takes over the world

Hannah Mahoney, USA

steelhead
the long journey
to my plate

Annette Makino, USA

living a life
of anonymity
monk's hood lichen

Sharon Martina, USA

news of war
in the crack of the wall
this anonymous flower

Françoise Maurice, France

when she says Kerouac unidentified butterflies

Tanya McDonald, USA

barbie's dreamhouse youths knock at the door

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

anthropocene the home I no longer recognize

Akhila Mohan CG, India

mermaid poison
my grandson
writes noir

Wilda Morris, USA

senior wellness check
another inch lost
but to where

Laurie D. Morrissey, USA

campaign promises
a broken record
for funds raised

Spyros Mylonas, USA

Sunday morning
grandmother brushes
her one tooth

Nika, Canada

transpacific storms dry tongues the other side

Subir Ningthouja, India

a gale blowing;
the glossy brochure
full of headstones

Sean O'Connor, Ireland

the stale smokiness of a stranger
library book

Debbie Olson, USA

exp: ides / Mar

Roland Packer, Canada

ambulance siren the beggar bows his head

Pravat Kumar Padhy, India

sundown
a village where everyone
wears my face

Stephanie Palombo, USA

he said she said the shit on the bed

Christopher Patchel, USA

gradatim
building
a
house
within
me

jingkieng jri

I connect
disconnect
& re-connect

Deepa Patil, India

snowblowers the men with their biggest

Marianne Paul, Canada

crazy quilt
scraps of my past
take on new colours

Jacquie Pearce, Canada

coming apart
at the seams - - -
fast fashion

petro c.k., USA

how cold
the meat I have to cook
for dinner

Kamil Plich, Germany

waning moron . . .
half-asleep I misread
the poem's first line

Thomas Powell, Ireland

a high five
left hanging
situationship

under the influence superior mirage

Ganesh R., India

editor friend
workshopping a poem
she later rejects

Bryan Rickert, USA

no will inside the doctor's empty can't

the tales you tell unlocked by face

rs, USA

post-election dinner
a heap of curry leaves
on the trash plate

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

rush hour
that feeling the other line
moves faster

Olivier Schopfer, Switzerland

his habit snorting another line of credit

Julie Schwerin, USA

turning teen to *bulimia nervosa*

fatty (acid) body shamed the nth time

her worthiness under the scalpel

Teji Sethi, India

milk and pill—
at least some things
work together

Richa Sharma, India

too shy
to make friends
a potted peony

Neena Singh, India

tall poppies
the C-Suite announces
more layoffs

Joshua St. Claire, USA

private room
mother's smile safe
in a glass of water

Stephenie Story, USA

pastel skies . . .
a lifeless
receiving blanket

Jan Stretch, Canada

silent spring
the drip drip drip
of her taxotere

my religion of glottal stops om

Raghav Prashant Sundar, India

cellblock lighting for beginning readers

a neo-Boolean afraid to change lanes

Patrick Sweeney, Japan

first date
a day lost exploring
my pockets

Herb Tate, UK

in a world
of reality TV
reality

Angela Terry, USA

ski lift conversation passing ravens

Elizabeth McMunn-Tetangco, USA

one-minute phone call
from the favorite son
cicada shell

Elisa Theriana, Indonesia

magenta sky
putting a smile on
bruises

C. X. Turner, UK

feng shui
I rearrange the people
in my life

Prashanth V, India

parallel universe
my garage band
still rehearsing

Jeffrey Walthall, USA

insisting
he's not being bullied
the black-eyed boy

Michael Dylan Welch, USA

balletic his tongue ballistic
crayon recycling so many melted hearts

Genevieve Wynand, Canada

Haiga



Poem: Vidhi Ashar, India

Art: Aishwarya Vedula, India



Maxianne Berger, Canada



Jerome Berglund, USA

daily planner . . .



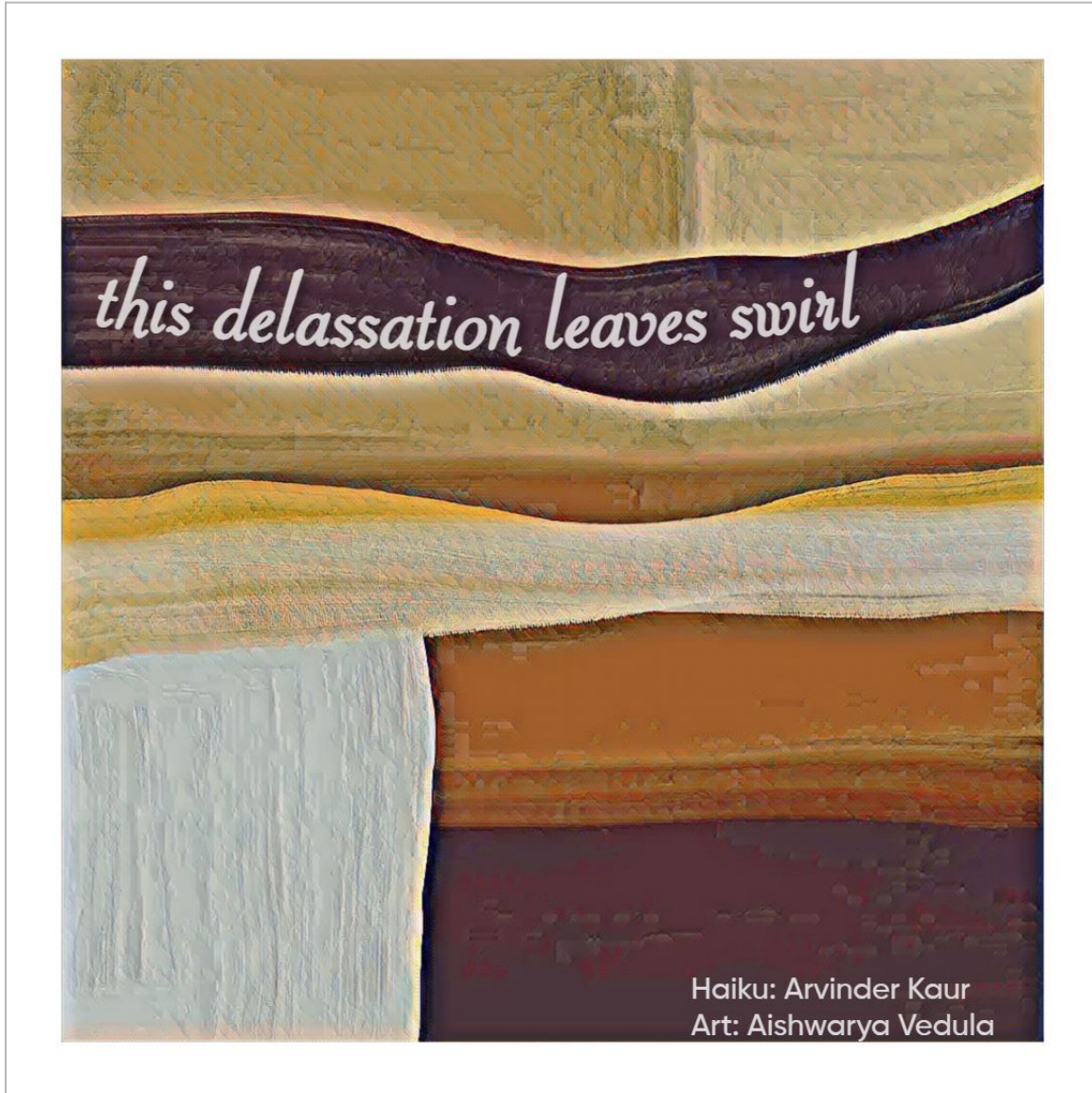
Terri L. French, 2023

the things in life
I leave to chance

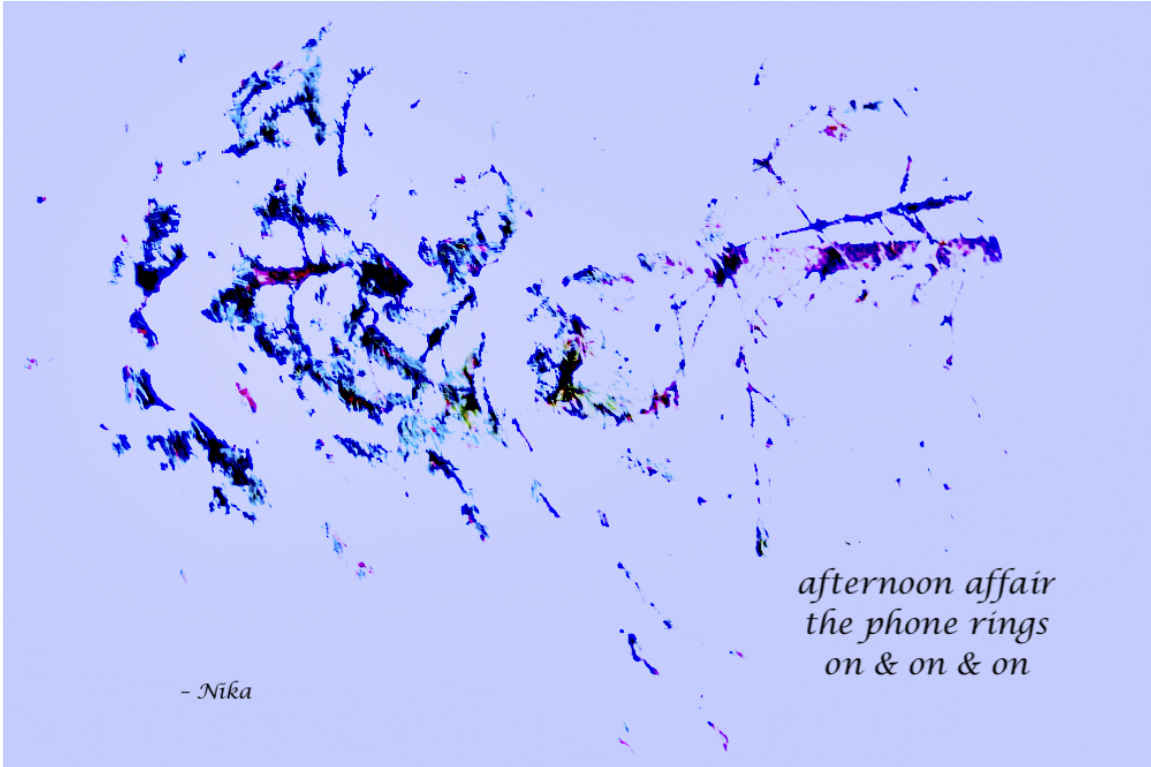
Terri L. French, USA



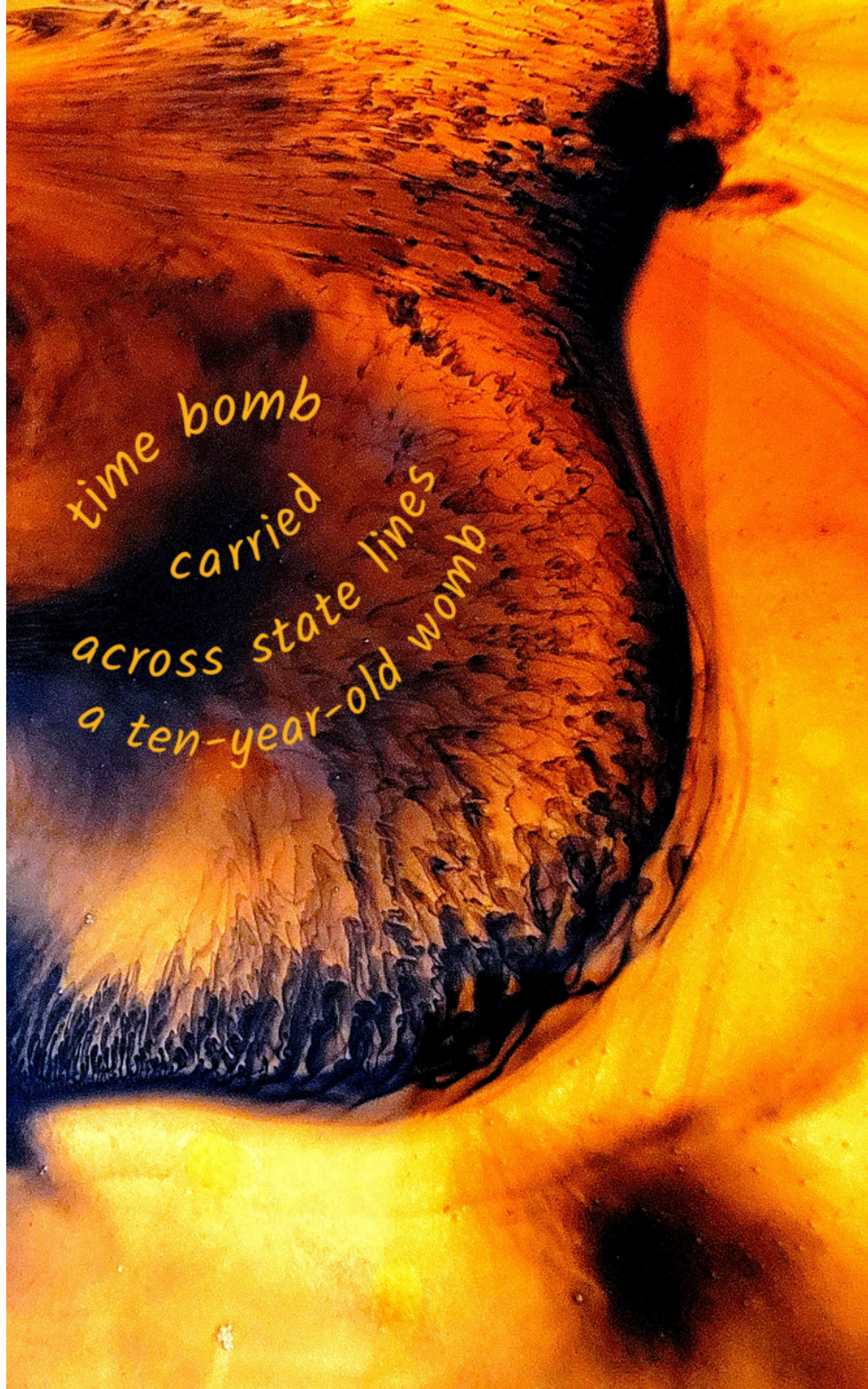
Maribel Herbert, USA



Poem: Arvinder Kaur, India
Art: Aishwarya Vedula, India



Nika, Canada



Julie Schwerin, USA

sinking depression into the black dog's darkness

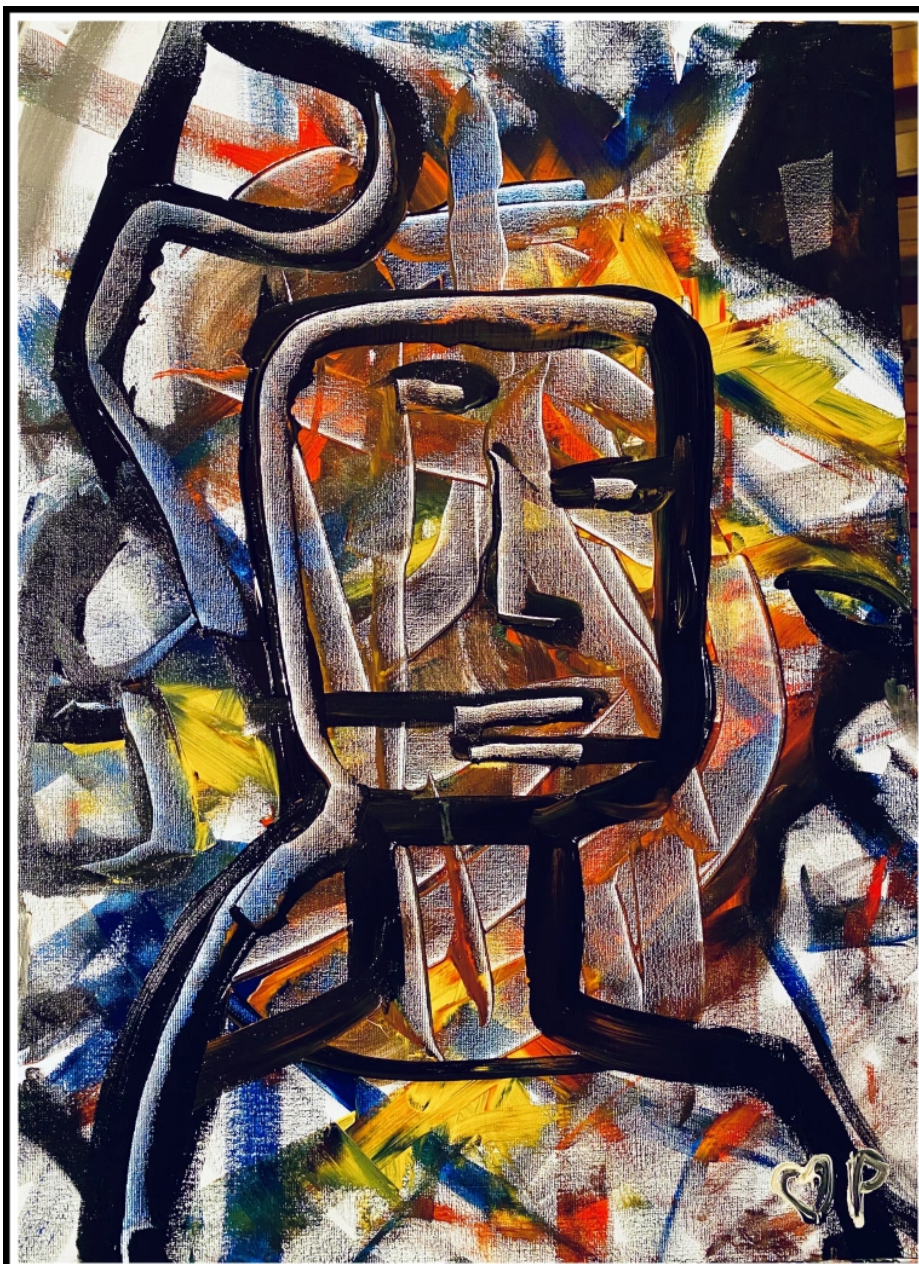


words/image(C)DStrange

Debbie Strange, Canada



Aishwarya Vedula, India



bombing raid
we're all getting closer
to heaven

Poem: Eugeniusz Zacharski, Poland

Art: Jacek Pokrak, Poland

Haibun

The Recurring Dream of San Francisco

There are usually stairs, and dark buildings, and fog blowing in. Sometimes an encounter with an old lover—*oh, you again*. Once I found two blankets that were mine, left on a ledge—a man saw me take them and called the cops. It's an easy city to hide in, and the least occasion is cause for fanfare—say, a meal of Alaskan halibut served by acrobats. And it's a city made for walking, which I do resolutely, clutching my big red purse—looking for a friend who left my keys on the table, a chain with my childhood name and a rainbow.

colander
the memory
of nevermore

Cynthia Anderson, USA

Overheard at the Welcome Parade

Stella says they don't speak our language but get free housing, no questions asked. Stella says they lounge in the cafe where her friend works, playing games on phones paid for with our taxes. Stella's youngest says mothers and babies left behind are killed in missile strikes. It's true, she says, looking up at her mother, Sister Philomena saw it on breaking news. They can photoshop anything these days, Stella says. Then gives her youngest a clout on the ear.

moment of silence
the bandleader raises
her eyebrow

Roberta Beary, USA/Ireland

Russet Potatoes & Serotonin

When he's anxious, I cook him his favorite meal. Meatloaf and mashed potatoes or homemade venison stew. I don't know whether he knows why I cook him his favorite meals when I do. I imagine he picks up on it, on some level. We have the habit of letting each other engage the time to process big feelings and revelations that come up in life from time to time. A good, honest conversation over a hearty, home-cooked meal made with love can change/save/restore/replenish the world.

sunshine pours
from a leak in the roof
base camp

Erin Castaldi, USA

Promise Keepers

He packs an overnight bag, tossing a worn, black NIV Bible on top of his underwear. “Can’t you stay home with the boys and me this weekend?” I ask. “No, I gotta go,” he says. “This is a big meeting. I’ll come back a better husband and father. A stronger Christian man.”

church supper
women cooking
on the Lord’s day

The boys and I go stay at his grandparents’ vacant house on the mountain. They’ve both been gone a couple years, but I still envision Ruby making fried pies at the gas stove. I tell the boys we are having a sleepover and turn it into an adventure. But, truthfully, I’m angry at my husband. Tired of playing second fiddle to God.

church organist
the way her feet
pound the pedals

When he returns the house will be empty. Oh, we will come back in time for me to make supper. He will say grace, holler at one of the kids for putting his elbows on the table, tell me, “Thank you, honey. It was good.” Then he’ll kiss the top of my head and go out to his shop to tinker ’til bedtime. I’ll scrape what’s left of supper into the dogs’ bowls and go to draw the boys a bath.

baptism
the sins that refuse
to let go

Terri L. French, USA

Autopilot

Dad, retired airline pilot, always in control, is driving the car. Unlike me, he's been an excellent driver all his life. I've told him three times to turn off at the next exit. Too late, he drifts onto the exit without slowing. I grab the wheel and scream, *slow down, Dad*. Unmoved, I see an unacknowledging glaze in his eyes.

gently wetting
a bonsai's tips—
the feeding bottle

Richard L. Matta, USA

A Different Drum

Every now and then, Neil asks me if I remember meeting *so-and-so* in Listowel and my answer is *when?* and, if he says *at the all-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil*, I laugh loudly as a melange of memories surfaces . . . having another G&T with ice and a slice as traditional tunes and songs tumble out from the pub sessions onto narrow balmy streets, and a stream of strangers to whom he is introducing his new girlfriend; but I do remember PJ, the *bodhrán* player in Neil's trad group – a rangy Clareman who migrated over the border to this market town – who percussed the weekly sessions in the Harp and Lion, where he told me that he also made *bodhráns*, sparking my desire for one.

car park transaction . . .
the new drum's oily skin
still smelling of goat

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

Note 1: The All-Ireland *Fleadh Cheoil* is a large annual Irish music festival, held in August. Each year a single town or city hosts the *Fleadh Cheoil*.

Note 2: The *bodhrán* is a frame drum used in Irish music, made with a wooden frame covered with goat skin on one side and usually played with a tipper (stick).

She comes to me

in my dreams, my mother. Spry, and lively (even though she's dead), a real Spitfire, reminiscent of the nickname given to her as a child of wartimes. She grins and cackles, happier than I ever saw her in life. *Happy*, that's the only word for it, as if something is about to happen. She visits me twice that week, flitting about in my dreams, happily waiting . . .

cardiac unit
not ready to party
with her yet

Marianne Paul, Canada

Discharged

In the years after Vietnam, I remember him sitting out on the patio with his cigarettes and cheap beer. Always pouring one out into the dog bowl. I figure he just got tired of drinking alone.

pawn shop
a few purple hearts
gathering dust

Bryan Rickert, USA

Motivational Speech

First, you have to understand that you are nothing. I am something. I've been turning around failures for thirty years. Failures like this place. Failures like you. Weekends are for winners. You shouldn't need training to know how things work around here. Figure it out. Why do you delegate so much? Your team needs to know you can execute. I shouldn't have to explain myself. What I want is self-evident. When do you get to see your family? Why would they want to see the face of a loser like you? I haven't seen my family in months. I'm not with my family right now because I am mentoring you. You think I am being hurtful? You should thank me for my coaching. Go read Viktor Frankl. It sounds like you need to figure out your *why* so you can handle my *how*. Do you still have a job? Well, for the moment that is up to you.

kindergarten
the children line up behind
the tallest boy

Joshua St. Claire, USA

A List for My Kids of Legitimate Reasons to Interrupt Me While I Am in the Bathroom

- The washer is unbalanced and careening wildly
- The brownie timer is going off
- The spaghetti is boiling over
- There is an emergency alert on the TV that is not just a test
- The cat threw up (but not just a hairball)
- There has been a fight and someone is bleeding profusely
- N*Sync has reunited to do a laxative commercial which will only run one time—right now—and then be immediately deleted on all media
- A vampire is knocking at the door and asking to be let in (a real one, not a trick-or-treater)
- A marine biologist and a sociologist have teamed up to teach a brittle star sign language which it uses to dictate haiku about its life, which is being live streamed on YouTube as the brittle star slowly succumbs to a fatal illness
- Definitive and incontrovertible evidence has been found that proves a massive world-wide conspiracy to alter “The Berenstein Bears” to “The Berenstain Bears” exists and is on-going
- The internet has become sentient
- The Rapture
- Casey Kasem has been cloned and will host New Year’s Rockin’ Eve (December 31 at 10:00 PM or later only)
- An actual unicorn has been tamed in our backyard
- A Mongolian dance troupe has come to town and is performing *Waiting for Godot* set at a Starbucks where mobile orders pre-empt in-cafe orders for eternity
- The Zombie Apocalypse has arrived and the zombies are *actually here*

- Joyelle McSweeney, Joy Harjo, sam sax, Stephanie Burt, and Danez Smith are on the phone and they want to do a collaboration with me and I have to talk to them right now or they will call Billy Collins to see if he is available instead
- An archaeologist named after a Canadian province discovers a Vegetable Lamb of Tartary which, just now, started to weave its wool into a cocoon
- All the world's vinegar has been transmuted into Screaming Eagle Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 for the next 27 minutes
- CERN has produced a micro black hole that has begun eating the earth

the pitter-patter of little feet just the cats

Joshua St. Claire, USA

Dear Daniel

So many girls, dear Bond. So many beds you've shared.
Like Anya Amasova with Ringo—whatever did she see in him?

youth club dance
Mam's mascara
on my 'stache

Melina Havelock only had eyes for you. And for many years
Eva Green still stalked Casinos as Vesper Lynd. Long after we'd all
undressed Ursula, or searched for a patch of pink on Shirley Eaton's
golden body. Were you drawn to their names?

flutter of moths
under the porch light
a pouted kiss

Like Mary Goodnight and her good nights, and the chilled smile
of Miranda Frost. What of those lovely ladies Jenny Flex
and Honey Rider, or Elektra King and Kissy Suzuki, alliterative to the end?
They weren't a touch on Octopussy and Zenia Onatop,
though Plenty O'Toole and Pussy Galore were in the running.

three refusals
at the first fence
pulled up

Yes, there was always that touch of class, never stirred . . .
except when living twice with Aki, or once with Solitaire,
or flying over moon-shadows with Holly Goodhead,
forever haunted by the diamonds of Tiffany Case.

proposing again . . .
the steady rasp
of her emery board

They say you had the hots for fish-mealed Helga Brandt,
for Ruby Bartlett with her chicken salmonella gift,
and even Paris Carver, who never died today, nor tomorrow.
But Tracy Draco was the closest to your heart. A countess,
at her Majesty's service like Judi, a Dame no less.

ocean tide honeymoon ebbing away

Which brings me to you, dear Bond. You've changed.
We all get shorter with age, but you seem to bruise more easily.
And is it my imagination, or are there tears within your eyes?
But then again, who wouldn't cry?

open marriage her diary locked shut

What man could fail to rage against a pen that holds him
back from she, the One, allowed only to reciprocate
her unrequited love with a wink or the casual throw of a hat?
Spare more than a penny for her heart, dear Bond . . .

7 years ditching her twinsets for leather

. . . before it's too late.

still not home
the hourglass figure
of an hourglass

Lew Watts, USA

Pilgarlic

What finally broke him seemed so innocuous. After all, we'd been doing it since we met in Yosemite. Signing off our emails with an insult. I believe the earliest may have been "fucktard," quite innocent in retrospect. I remember toying with a reply of "knobhead" for days before landing on the more delicious "toe-rag." The next time Rob signed off with "pillock," which triggered my vile and equally-testicular "cullion."

We did stray into two words for a while—"sycophantic lickspittle," "femiculous lubberwort," and "hercine cockolorum" were particularly memorable—before reverting to the single expletive: "loblolly," "poltroon," and the wonderful "slubberdegullion." And so it was a surprise one day when he replied with the simple P-word, "pinhead." Since then, silence.

climbing Mt Baldy . . .
the final pitch
a little hairy

Lew Watts, USA

Linked verse

Rengay

Vice

all those years
under his uniform
irezumi

*blinding white
the first snow*

bodies exhibition
science museum
making lampshades

*river dried up
empty cups asunder
sleeping until noon*

sunflower paintings
organic material

*secret rooms
into the unknown
solving for XXX*

Jerome Berglund, USA
& *petro c. k.*, USA

I'll Be Home

the fluid reservoirs
topped off
Christmas morning

*solar panels
covered in snow*

coming up
with my penny
the oasis stranger

*making room
for all of us
the one plowed lane*

following the star
on a state trooper's hat

*multi-car pileup
the app takes us home
by another way*

Dan Schwerin, USA
& Julie Schwerin, USA

Logophiles

he wins another
game of *Scrabble*
gynecologist

*the poet's
refrigerator haiku magnets*

the spine
of her thesaurus
cracked

*company coming
she straightens her bookstack
into a neat column*

the random word generator
defaults to X and O

*tic tac toe
with her pen pal...
scented envelopes*

Angela Terry, USA
& Julie Schwerin, USA

Tan-Renga

hand marks
on the trunk where they
pulled it down

buffalo mozzarella
dog friendly patio

Sara Plain, USA
& *Jerome Berglund, USA*

Woven Tan-Renga*

**premiere of this new linked form*

a lager

blackcurrant clouds

in three gulps

you leave the key

summer's end

Bryan Rickert, USA

Kat Lehmann, USA

backcountry hike

mile after mile

the hellos and goodbyes

the things left unsaid

of a thousand maples

Kat Lehmann, USA

Bryan Rickert, USA

Sequences

Outset

New Year's...
poised atop
the bunny slope

blowing the dust off
Gardening for Dummies

tech support
impressive expertise
in patience

beginner cha cha
is this a date?

widowed
her first time
behind the wheel

Ode to Joy
on pint-size violins

Christopher Patchel, USA

Split Sequences

Detour

parting waters

streetlight
illuminating
my mind

the vocabulary

the life
of an introvert
frost flower

of fish

unlearning
the rules
night sky

rs, Middletown, USA
Hemapriya Chellappan, India

Broken Bands

all we've done

*couples counseling
for an hour each week
we tell the truth*

to repair

tennis match
the back and forth
of blame

this marriage

*enso moon
we find a way back
to each other*

spring gales tearing

banana peels
slipping back into
our old ways

the tender green

*puppet show
we keep pretending
for the kids*

Bryan Rickert, USA
& Susan Burch, USA



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